

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 19, 2010

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to commend your staff for their efforts to aid Tennesseans affected by recent disastrous flooding, and to request additional measures to help those affected. As you know, the deadly floods have seriously affected tens of thousands of Tennessee families in over half of the state's counties. In response to Governor Phil Bredesen's request for federal disaster assistance, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has authorized the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) to issue Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) benefits to flood victims. This is a great help to families who find themselves in desperate need of assistance.

We are writing to request a significant extension of the current deadlines for flood victims in our state to apply for disaster assistance from the Tennessee Department of Human Services. The current deadlines are Thursday May 20 for some benefits and Friday May 21 for other benefits. We have been informed that the Memphis and Nashville Human Services offices are swamped with applicants. While the Tennessee DHS has been doing Herculean work under exceedingly difficult circumstances, more time is needed to ensure that citizens are properly served. In Nashville, victims have been standing in line for many hours without even getting into the building. In some rural counties, DHS offices remain closed or inaccessible due to damage to the infrastructure. Throughout the flood-ravaged area, many victims remain unaware of the availability of food assistance, or of how to obtain it. With only a few days left until the application deadline, the number of applications remains well below levels that could be expected, based on the experience of other states following similar disasters, e.g., the Iowa floods of 2008. Department of Human Services personnel have been working tirelessly and with great dedication to help flood victims obtain D-SNAP benefits by this week's deadline, but that deadline is simply not realistic under the conditions existing throughout the flood-stricken areas.

It is our understanding that the Tennessee Department of Human Services is submitting information to your staff on an ongoing basis, and we are confident that information will confirm the need to extend the current deadline for flood victims to obtain D-SNAP benefits. We would appreciate it very much if you would grant such an extension, which

is of course extremely urgent. Thank you again for the important assistance of your Department for the people of our state.

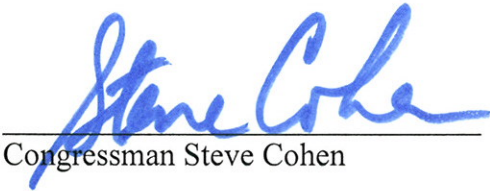
Sincerely,



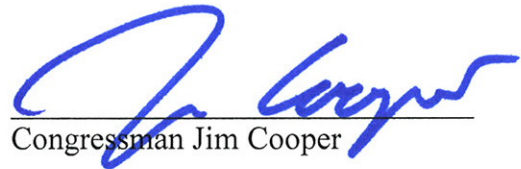
Senator Lamar Alexander



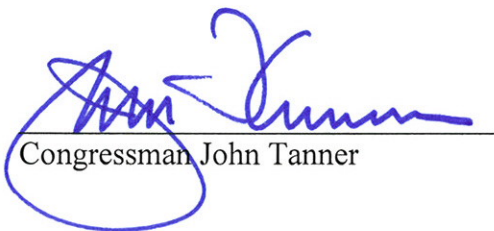
Senator Bob Corker



Congressman Steve Cohen



Congressman Jim Cooper



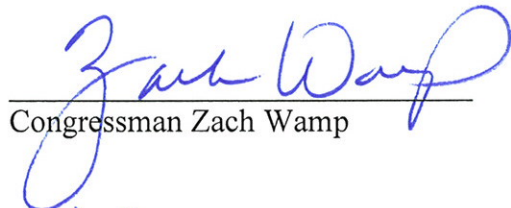
Congressman John Tanner



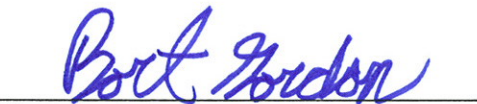
Congressman Marsha Blackburn



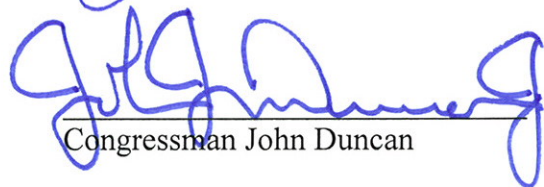
Congressman Phil Roe



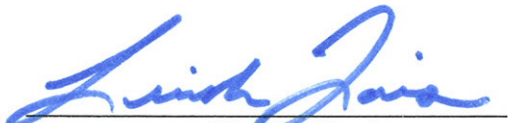
Congressman Zach Wamp



Congressman Bart Gordon



Congressman John Duncan



Congressman Lincoln Davis